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News

Fontanans help Workforce Investment Board succeed

By SHEL SEGAL

A native of Fontana, Phil Cothran has been selling insurance on Sierra Avenue for the past 18 years. But his real passion comes from serving on the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board.

Administered as a public-private venture through the U.S. Department of Labor, the board focuses on helping people find jobs, changing their skills to find better paying jobs and forecasting what the area's job needs will be in the future, Cothran said.

As a member of both the local and national boards that oversee this, Cothran said the board also finds employers who will hire people through this program and possibly even give them training to enter a new field.

"You can be employed and want a better job," said Cothran, who added the board helped nearly 78,000 county residents in 2005. "Anyone from having a master's degree down to jobless people can be helped. We also have a youth area we take care of beginning at age 17."

In addition, Cothran said the board has three offices throughout the county -- in San Bernardino, Rancho Cucamonga and Victorville -- which try to bring many public and private organizations under one umbrella.

"People come to us," he said. "We have three one-stops around the county. We bring as many government and private agencies into one place as possible."

One of the purposes of the program is to match potential employees with potential employers, even if that means retraining someone or just giving them a few extra pointers on a new position, Cothran said.

"We do a lot of talking people into upgrading their skills and they can get a more substantial raise in their pay," he said. "One of our major roles is being (able to mediate) between employers, employees and the training aspect."

The training aspect is very important as while there are plenty of job seekers in the county, their skills do not always match the current needs of employers, Cothran said.

"We look at the economy in San Bernardino County and look at what are going to be the needs of the employers," he said. "The board spends most of its time with the employers. There's no shortage of employees coming through the door."

For example, while much has been made over the years about American manufacturing jobs going overseas, Cothran said there are many manufacturing jobs locally that aren't being filled.

"The manufacturing jobs are very high tech," said Cothran, adding California Steel has trained more than 100 electricians through this program. "You're still making parts, but you have to know how to use a computer."

Two other Fontana-based manufacturing companies in the program are S and D Specialty and Stockmar Industrial, Cothran said.

Other areas with job shortages are construction and the medical field, especially in nursing, Cothran said.

THE CHAIRMAN of the local board, Terry Klenske of Fontana-based Dalton Trucking, said the program has been very successful.

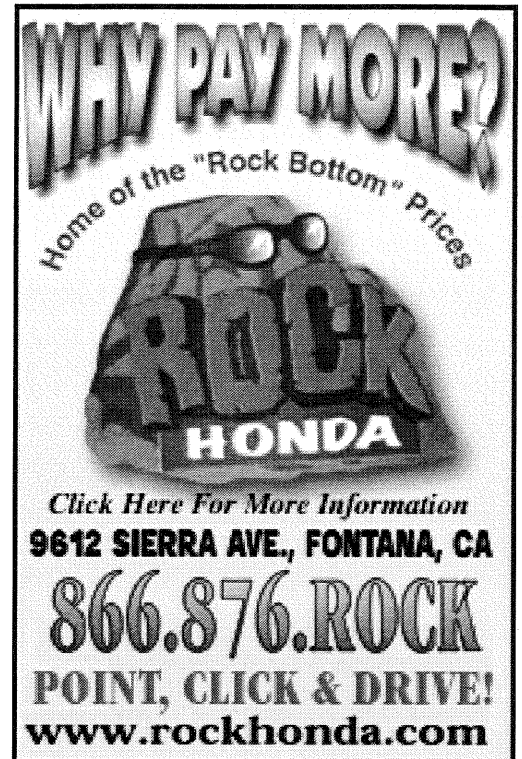
"We're very effective at utilizing what we have available," Klenske said. "We are facilitators. We try to match up people through our services with better opportunities. For the funds we have, I feel we're very effective at helping people who want to be helped. We have a great track record at helping people who want an entry level job and getting them on a career path."

WHILE the program comes from the federal government, it is business people who make the day-to-day decisions on how to run it, Cothran said.

"Our board is business driven," said Cothran, who added the program is free to job seekers. "Most of the board is comprised of private businesses. We interface with industry sectors."

"What makes this unique is it is federally funded, but private sector businesses drive it. It's not a typical federal program. Regular business guys state the direction for how this is going to go in San Bernardino County and how job training will be accomplished."

In addition, "blue collar" jobs are not the only ones offered through this program, Cothran said. "White collar" jobs can be found here as well.



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"It's not entirely low-end, entry level jobs," Cothran said. "It's also for management-type, highly educated, well-trained people."

But the main reason for the program is to keep the county's economic engine moving, Cothran said.

"There's nothing more important to the area than a trained workforce," Cothran said. "Economic growth isn't going to happen without that."

For more information about the program, call 387-9870.

One-stop opportunity center

Employment Resource Center helps connect employees with employers

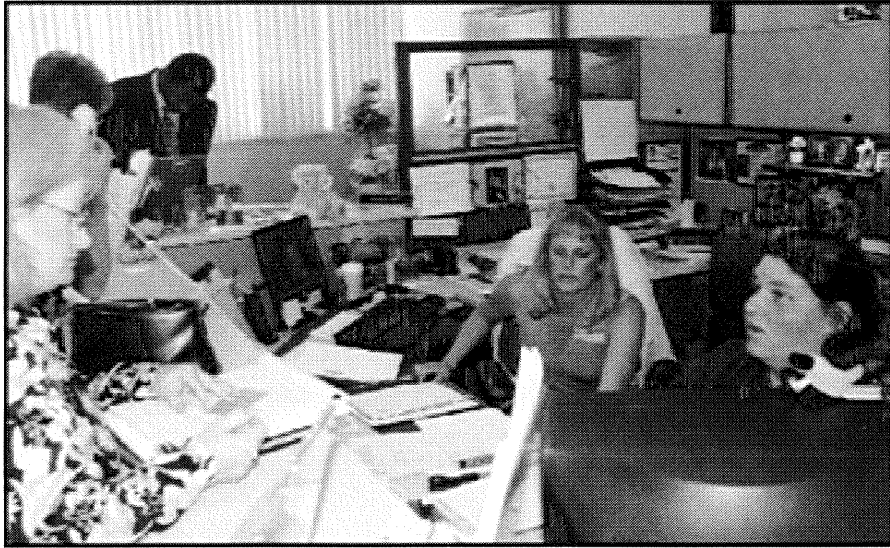


Photo by Peter Day The Hesperia Employment Resource Center is a hub of activity for job seekers. The location serves up to 1,500 each month.

By PETER DAY/Star Editor

Out of work and with her only previous employment as a fast food restaurant cashier, Lori's future didn't seem too bright. So she turned to the Employment Resource Center in Hesperia for assistance.

The ERC, located near the corner of Main Street and Eleventh Avenue, helped her enroll in the Victor Valley College nursing program. Upon completion, the former near minimum wage worker began a new career as a Registered Nurse — with a starting salary of \$6,635 per month.

Each month, 1,200 to 1,500 job seekers like Lori— or those interested in simply improving their careers — utilize the services of the Hesperia ERC, which serves the entire Victor Valley and surrounding areas. Last year, the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board, which oversees the Hesperia and other ERCs, assisted nearly 78,000 job seekers.

“We help connect local people with local jobs,” said Barbara Halsey, director of the agency.

Although not everyone experiences as dramatic an upgrade in employment as Lori, the Hesperia ERC

has numerous success stories. A former National Guard employee named Arnold saw his earnings go from \$18 to \$28 per hour with the ERC's help.

But sometimes the ERC's help isn't only measured in dollars per hour but in personal pride and hope. One man came to the ERC after having not worked for three years due to a back injury. After having no luck re-entering his field as a Class A truck driver, the ERC assisted him in developing his resume and finding leads. Today, he is working locally, and his future is promising.

But the ERC also helps employers, including large enterprises such as the Apple WalMart distribution center, the Southern California Logistics Airport and others, to find workers.

"What business needs in workforce, we want to provide," she said. "It basically starts with the demand of business."

By helping develop a viable workforce, the Victor Valley is continuing to become a more vibrant location for commerce and industry. The key employment sectors are logistics distribution, health care, construction, manufacturing and transportation.

"It's almost a role of intermediary," Halsey said.

The ERC also complements the community colleges by helping graduates translate the language of education into a language of business.

One of the keys, according to Halsey, is "tailoring and customizing training."

The Hesperia ERC has a staff of trained, certified career counselors who counsel job seekers one-on-one, or for those who prefer a more self-directed approach, teach them to use the ERC's resource library or computers. The constantly expanding library includes books on a wide diversity of subjects.

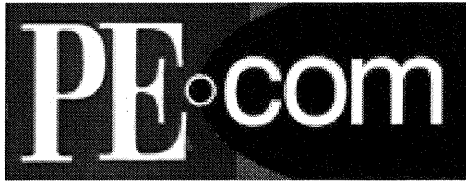
ERC representatives conduct personal interviews to address skills and detect issues that can block vocational improvement. After the initial screening, representatives direct clients toward a tailored skilled advancement — and career.

"We want people to know that there are good jobs," Halsey said.

The Hesperia ERC is at 15555 Main Street #G3/G4. For more information, call 949-8526.

This story originally appeared in the Hesperia Star Tue Jul, 11 2006

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Space for Business

Inland company seeks to commercialize rocket vehicles

10:00 PM PDT on Tuesday, July 4, 2006

By DEVONA WELLS
The Press-Enterprise

Among the first companies to settle in a small office at the former Norton Air Force Base, Kelly Space & Technology now covers 20 acres.

Here the company tests rocket and jet engines, designs relaunchable space vehicles, and has developed devices to detect explosives.

The company turned a profit for the first time in 2002, nine years after it was founded.

"There is no cheap way of getting to space and back," said Mike Gallo, president and chief operating officer.

Gallo compares the space industry today to the personal computer industry in 1979 -- when the world needed a couple of entrepreneurs to figure out how to bring a pricey and extra-large product into homes.

Q: Why did you choose this industry?

A:

Michael Gallo

Company: Kelly Space & Technology

Title: President and Chief Operating Officer

Education: Graduated from Norwich University

Type of

Industry: Aerospace

Location: 294 S. Leland Norton Way at the former Norton Air Force Base, San Bernardino

Employees: 27

Revenue: \$6.6 million for 2005

Year

founded: 1993



Stan Lim / The Press-Enterprise

Expansion commercial business would help the Defense Department get better prices, says Mike Gallo, of Kelly Space and Technology in San Bernardino.

Sometimes it's just life circumstances that get you there. Every kid my age wanted to be an astronaut. This has been a real plan in my life since I was a kid. That's why I went to a military academy and to the Air Force and TRW. To be an astronaut, you have to get your five doctoral degrees. I was more interested in the technical and the engineering and the business aspects in making a difference in commercializing space.

Q: What inspires you?

A: I think doing things that are worth doing

and figuring out creative ways of solving problems. That's what we really do here.

Q: What has been your biggest challenge?

A: Capitalization. Choosing to be a development company and developing advanced technology you have to figure out how to get money. You're chasing the money for so long. That's probably the toughest challenge of starting any business.

Q: What advice would you give other executives?

A: Have a clear business plan in mind for which business unit you want to develop and get the right people.

Q: How do you retain good employees?

A: We pay well and we have a good benefits package. We only get the best. The real key is the younger folks. There's also the excitement of developing new technology they normally wouldn't get to work on until much later in their career. They get exposure to a wide range of business aspects, which keeps perspective on what their contribution is to the business.

Q: How will your company change in the next five years?

A: I see us merging or I guess expanding to more commercial business than Department of Defense

business. This is where the Department of Defense would like companies to go. If there's a commercial base established, they get the best possible prices.

Q: How does being located in the Inland Empire affect your company?

A: The Inland Empire has been good to us. We've been able to draw on a very, very competent workforce. You might not think there's a lot of rocket scientists here, but there are a lot of retired aerospace executives who still have a lot in them. The next big advantage is the availability of key infrastructure, particularly the former Norton Air Force Base.

Q: What's the most important thing you do every week?

A: Ensuring performance on current contracts and deploying more technology to the commercial marketplace. It's a different thing every day. Then really positioning for next year's revenue. That takes vigilance.

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Board director offers vision to improve county work force

By Michael Rappaport
Staff Writer

If you're looking for a job in San Bernardino County, the odds are Barbara Halsey can help you. If you're an employer or an entrepreneur, she can definitely help. Halsey is the director of the county's Workforce Investment Board, which has a mission of putting potential employers and employees together and helping both.

In a rapidly growing county,

Halsey is a busy person. She sat down to answer six questions from The Sun just before flying off for two days of meetings in Sacramento.

Question: What role does the Workforce Investment Board play in the economic life of San Bernardino County?

Answer: The board is at the heart of programs that meet the needs of growing industries in the county by providing employment

direction and career advice to county residents. Its role is to identify work-force issues and develop and implement solutions for business and individuals.

These solutions strengthen local business and improve the quality of life for residents through employment and lead to the long-term economic growth of the county.

The SBC-WIB is comprised of private and public members that

are appointed by and serve under the direction of the county Board of Supervisors. We examine the work-force needs of businesses that are located in San Bernardino County or thinking about locating here. We also develop programs that will build the skills of the local work force.

In addition to looking at what's happening now, we are constantly monitoring what the needs of business will be in the future. Our

job is to be thinking about how to prepare people for the jobs that will be here tomorrow.

For example, the SBC-WIB has taken the lead in developing creative strategies to increase the number of nursing graduates and retain them in the work force, which is a challenge in California. In collaboration with Loma Linda University Children's Hospital and local community colleges, we

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developed an initiative that has increased nurse retention by 20 percent.

Another role is making people aware of the career opportunities that exist in San Bernardino County. Through our research, we have learned of specific sectors that are growing. We have developed in-depth career ladder studies, which will be published this year to give residents a better understanding of the career opportunities available in high-growth sectors.

Q. If there's one thing people don't know about what your group does that you think they should know, what would that be?

A. Since we are a private, business-led organization, we are able to maintain the interests of businesses at the heart of our work. These leaders, because they run businesses, understand first-hand how critical work-force issues are. They help us hold that purview as the guiding factor of all we do.

Another key aspect is the diversity of projects and programs that the SBC-WIB funds and develops. Our programs include everything from community-based youth programs to the Superintendent of Schools' Alliance for Education, specific customized training programs with business and employment resource centers where anyone can go and receive information on the job market.

In these initiatives, the board is the intermediary, negotiator, and problem-solver among the parties involved, which include business, education, government, labor and community-based organizations. All of these parties are brought together to help contribute to solutions to work force needs in the short and long term.

We are very concerned about the health of local businesses. We fund programs and services through our economic development arm that assists with business retention and expansion.

Q. How has San Bernardino County changed over the last 10-15 years as an employment market?

A. San Bernardino County added 4.9 jobs for each new unit of housing from 1994 to 2001.

In recent years, the Inland Empire region has led the state in job growth. Higher-paying sectors in the region will add jobs in 2006 as professional, scientific and management operations increase their presence here.

San Bernardino County has transitioned from offering mostly blue-collar jobs to white-collar careers. It was considered a bedroom and blue-collar community 15 years ago. Now San Bernardino County has evolved as an economic engine. People now want to build lives here rather than just live here. The job market has changed. More professionals have moved here, and we are seeing an increase in demand for those skilled professionals. There has been growth in retail, construction, continued growth in manufacturing (in which the jobs have become more high-tech and more automated) and increasing opportunities in health care and goods movement. The economic base of the county is becoming more diverse.

The average age in San Bernardino County is decreasing. The median age in the county is currently 27.6. As of the 2000 census, the average age was 30.6.

Because housing in San Bernardino County is affordable (San Bernardino County's median housing price in April was \$360,000), more young families are moving here. This has led to a growth in the younger work force. With a younger work force, our challenge is getting them connected with the type of job opportunities that will provide them with the income they need to support the quality of life they seek.

Q. How do you expect it to change as an employment market over the next 10-15 years?

A. In San Bernardino County, you can enter into the work force at almost any level. We are seeing growth in retail, warehousing and logistics. We will see greater growth in what are perceived as true white collar, management and professional jobs, as well as the sectors related to science and technology.

We will see an increase in those jobs that require advanced degrees and increased demand for individuals with degrees. We are also seeing increased de-

mand for vocational and technical-trades-related skill sets.

Having a trained and skilled work force is the key element to the success of San Bernardino County's economy. Without the work-force talent, companies cannot grow here. As economic-development agencies are working to attract new business and assist businesses here with growth, the board has to be keenly aware of what is happening in the economy so it can effectively train the work force.

Q. What is the most satisfying thing about the work you do?

A. The work of the SBC-WIB can directly impact the quality of life our residents experience. It helps businesses grow and helps entrepreneurs make their dreams come true. It also helps people find careers that offer growth, satisfaction and a better life.

The kind of work performed by a Workforce Investment Board changes all the time. It is necessary to always be ahead of the trends in the economy. It is critical to be forward-thinking, aware of current opportunities and anticipating future challenges.

Q. What is the area where the county needs to improve the most in helping its residents with their employment needs?

A. Our county leadership, especially at the Board of Supervisors level, has been exemplary in their support of the work-force-development board. Their support is critical to the economic development and growth of the county.

The Board of Supervisors was visionary when it set the economic development and work force development strategies. They are leading us in the right direction, and we look forward to the quality of life their vision will offer current and future residents of the county.

We need to see improvement at the federal level. Developing a world-class work force requires adequate investment. Funding levels for programs that support developing the work force have seen staggering decreases over the past five years. Without priority investments to work-force training, we risk losing our competitive advantage.



Thomas R. Cordova/Staff photographer

Barbara Halsey, director of San Bernardino County's Workforce Investment Board, helps bring employers and employees together and advocates for continued growth and development in the county.